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TAGS: [SI](#)

SUBJECT: SLOVENIA: COM CALLS ON NEW CHIEF OF DEFENSE GUTMAN

REF: A. LJUBLJANA 346

[1](#)B. LJUBLJANA 388

Classified By: COM Thomas B. Robertson for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. On 20 July COM paid a courtesy call on the new Chief of Defense (CHOD) of the Slovenian Armed Forces (SAF) Lt. General Albin Gutman. Gutman, returning to the CHOD position for the second time, was well prepared and talked at length about the entire slate of U.S.-Slovenia military cooperation. COM used the opportunity to get updates on this summer's hot topics at the Ministry of Defense (MoD), including the highly contentious 8x8 armored vehicles purchase decision, C-130 transport aircraft needs, and the GoS's interest in purchasing fighter aircraft. Gutman delivered frank assessments of all three issues, saying the 8x8 deal was fair and final, C-130s are not on the shopping list, and national pride will soon make fighters a political priority. END SUMMARY.

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COM DRUMS UP INTEREST, GETS ANSWERS
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[1](#)2. (U) COM called on Gutman to congratulate him on his return to the CHOD position, encourage greater interest in military-to-military cooperation, and seek more information on several hot topics at the MoD this summer. He was accompanied by DATT, Office of Defense Cooperation Chief, Bilateral Affairs Officer (BAO), and PolMilOff. After an exchange of pleasantries, COM introduced the team working on military issues from the Embassy, briefed Gutman on the success of the recent Political Military talks at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and stressed that the Embassy is ready to respond to requests for assistance and push forward with cooperation.

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A FOCUS ON STRENGTHENING COOPERATION FOR THE LONG TERM
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[1](#)3. (U) Gutman began with an overview of current U.S.-Slovenia military cooperation, focusing largely on training and military schools. He noted the lack of military academies in Slovenia and said that the SAF traditionally sends its very best officers to the U.S. He stated an interest in guaranteed

slots in training classes and military schools, and was also curious about costs for these programs. Gutman asked for more information on the Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) corps and indicated that the SAF needs help developing their NCO corps and identifying the role of NCOs, with a focus on practicality.

¶4. (U) Gutman was very positive about cooperation in general, stating that he hoped to upgrade and enhance relations with the U.S. during his time as CHOD. He proposed a meeting at the working level to examine the issue and develop "more intensive cooperation for the long term." In this context, Gutman said that he was surprised to see how dramatically U.S.-Slovenia military-to-military cooperation had decreased since his previous term as CHOD.

¶5. (U) ODC Chief informed Gutman that individual training cooperation has increased significantly given the size of the Slovenian military (from 50 Slovenes taking part in 1998 to 80 in 2006) but confirmed the reduction in information exchange events between the middle 1990s and today (56 events in 1998, Gutman's last year during his first appointment as CHOD, and 11 events in 2006). Gutman was aware that the reduction in information exchange events was due to Slovenia's transition from a Partnership for Peace member and NATO aspirant in the mid 1990s to a full NATO member today. He noted that the focus of both the U.S. and Slovenia today is on future expansion of the Alliance.

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TRANSFORMATION AND PROCUREMENT IN THE SAF
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¶6. (C) Gutman initiated a discussion about cooperation on studying Slovenia's air defense needs and then segued into a frank overview of the current internal debate in the MoD and the Government about the purchase of fighter aircraft. Looking at the SAF's needs over the long term, Gutman indicated that costs for aircraft were of much less concern to him than personnel needs, saying that if there was the political desire to purchase aircraft, the GoS is "capable of finding the money." He is focused on making a timely decision on pilot training to ensure the MoD will have a cadre of pilots ready to go when the political decision is made regarding an aircraft purchase (most likely in 2009 or 2010). COM noted that the GoS was likely to get pushback from NATO and bigger countries about the need for fighter aircraft given NATO's over capacity, the lack of a clear air threat, and the detrimental effect this could have on Slovenia meeting other NATO force goals. Gutman acknowledged these points but politely and forcefully responded that the decision would be a "political one" that focused on (1) Slovenians' historical interest in aviation (which Gutman described by saying "we have piloting in our blood,") (2) a desire for the SAF to have top-of-the-line equipment for land, sea, and air, and, most importantly, (3) the unacceptable prospect of Croatia or Serbia, as a future NATO member, using their fighter aircraft to police Slovenia's airspace. (COMMENT: Slovenia's airspace is technically policed through an agreement with Italy. However, only one token flight has been made - the day after Slovenia became a NATO member in 2004 - and the GoS continues to look for a long term arrangement for its air defense. END COMMENT.)

¶7. (C) In response to a question from COM on transport capabilities and the possible purchase of a C-130, Gutman indicated that his focus was on troop transport via helicopter as opposed to the purchase of large transport aircraft, and he seemed to be content with the SAF's ability to utilize NATO transport aircraft when necessary. Gutman talked briefly about the controversial MoD selection on 12 June of Finnish defense contractor Patria Vehicles to supply 136 8x8 armored wheeled vehicles to the SAF by 2012 (ref B). He walked through a polished set of talking points, saying that the assessment of the bids was fair and that Patria made the better offer in terms of technology, finances, and benefit to the Slovenian economy. In spite of the intense discussion the issue has sparked in the press, Gutman gave

the impression that the final decision has been reached. In his opinion, Slovenian defense company Sistemska Tehnika lost the bid because of "inadequate business decisions" which led to a clearly inferior bid.

18. (C) Gutman concluded the meeting with comments about land and sea defense, and the SAF's continuing transformation efforts. He said that Slovenia would meet its promise to provide combat-ready units to NATO by 2012. He also talked about his interest in preserving some parts of the SAF that are not NATO oriented, for example, the Army's tank unit. He also expressed concern about the SAF's recruiting efforts given Slovenia's declining birthrate. Gutman concluded the meeting by expressing a desire to improve cooperation in the area of sea defense, stating that he expected an increasing political interest in strengthening the Slovenian Navy, particularly its search and rescue capabilities, and U.S. expertise in this area could be helpful. (COMMENT: Strengthening of the Slovenian Navy could prove to be contentious given the GoS's long-standing dispute with Croatia over open access to the sea through the Bay of Piran. END COMMENT.)

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FRIENDS IN HIGH PLACES
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19. (C) COMMENT: Gutman was appointed on 1 June to replace Major General Ladislav Lipic; the appointment officially became effective on June 2 (ref A). This is his second time in the Chief of Defense role. He was previously in the role from 1993 to 1998 under then Defense Minister, now Prime Minister, Janez Jansa. He is an experienced and professional soldier with an excellent reputation in military circles and he has the confidence of both PM Jansa and Minister of Defense Karl Erjavec. His knowledge of details of the SAF's activities during the lengthy meeting (1 hour 15 minutes) and his command of the needs of the SAF today and over the next 15 years was impressive. In spite of speculation that he will be a short-term, transition leader in the CHOD position, it is apparent that he has the experience and knowledge to make things happen and set the SAF's direction for the long term. Though he does not speak English, rare for a high ranking Slovene, he is highly interested in cooperation with the U.S. military and appreciative of the expertise and advice that Slovenia has received in the past. He spoke briefly to the BAO about his warm regard for the SAF - Colorado National Guard relationship, and was happy to hear that Adjutant General Mason Whitney (they met when Gutman was previously CHOD) would be visiting this November. We expect Gutman to continue Slovenia's strong support for NATO, U.S.-Slovenia military cooperation, and the further transformation of the SAF. END COMMENT.
ROBERTSON